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Identity Construction of EFL Pre-Service Teachers

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Resumen: La construcción de la identidad de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera en formación es un tema que se ha venido estudiando en la última década debido al interés por mejorar la calidad en la educación y las relaciones socio-educativas. La identidad de los docentes en formación es definida como un conjunto de creencias y valores que tiene una persona. Se ha observado que la mayor parte de estudios se enfocan en las metodologías de la enseñanza; sin embargo, se ha prestado poca atención a la formación de la identidad de futuros docentes. Además, el desarrollo de la identidad se ha visto retenido por la falta de apoyo de políticas gubernamentales y educativas. Los objetivos de esta síntesis de investigación son analizar los factores que influyen en la construcción de identidad de los docentes en formación y el proceso de evolución de la construcción de identidad de los mismos. Los resultados indican que la autoimagen, el entorno de aprendizaje, las prácticas, la motivación, y los aspectos cognitivos y emocionales fueron identificados como los principales factores que influyen en la construcción de identidad de los docentes en formación. Además, los patrones que intervienen en la construcción de identidad, el lado personal y profesional, y la interacción en diferentes comunidades son parte del proceso de evolución de la construcción de identidad de los profesores del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras claves: Identidad. Docentes en formación. Lengua extranjera. Autoimagen. Prácticas. Comunidades.



Abstract: EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction has been studied during the last decade due to the interest in improving the quality of education and socio-educational relationships. Student teachers' identity is defined as a set of beliefs and values that a person has. It has been observed that most of the research is focused on methodologies for teaching; however, little attention has been paid to pre-service teachers' identity formation. Furthermore, the development of pre-service teachers' identity has been retained by the lack of support from governmental and educational policies. The objectives of this research synthesis are to analyze the reported factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development and to explore the evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction goes through. In this exploratory research synthesis, twenty empirical articles have been selected, reviewed, and analyzed. The findings indicate that self-image, learning environment, practicum, motivation, and cognitive and emotional aspects were identified as the main factors that influence pre-service teachers' identity. Moreover, the patterns involved in identity construction, the professional and personal sides of pre-service teachers, and interaction in various communities were part of the evolution process of identity construction of student teachers.

Keywords: Identity. EFL pre-service teachers. Self-image. Practicum. Communities. Training program.



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Verónica and Belén



Dedicatory

I want to dedicate this work to my family, especially to my grandma, Yeyita, who has supported me during my entire life and taught me that it is always possible to start again.

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This work is wholeheartedly dedicated to my beloved parents who provided their moral and emotional support and to my siblings Gustavo, Geovanny, and Patricia who shared their words of advice and encouragement to continue my studies.

Belén

Introduction

Teacher identity construction has been an emerging topic in the field of education in the last years (Salinas & Ayala, 2017). There is much literature about the construction of a teacher identity about in-service teachers. However, there appears to be less research on this process for EFL pre-service teachers or student-teachers (Williams, 2010). According to Abbas and Fatemeh (2014), EFL pre-service teachers are studying their major not only for acquiring knowledge about the language but also, they learn how to teach it. Many pre-service teachers struggle because of the transitional change between being a student and becoming a teacher (Abbas & Fatemeh, 2014). Evaluating the concept of identity is essential to have a better understanding of the relationship between education and society (He & Lin, 2013). As Salinas and Ayala (2017) established, teachers' identity construction is the way that teachers learn to perform as professionals, how they apply theory in their teaching practices, how they theorize their practice, and how they teach.

This research synthesis aims to analyze EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction by evaluating the reported factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development and exploring the evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction goes through. To reach these goals, this research synthesis will analyze several empirical studies which will contribute to obtain the information required for the understanding of the topic.

This research wants to explore different factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction. According to Zhu, Rice, Li, and Zhu (2020), practicums are an essential part of the construction of identity because student teachers construct several identities due to the influence of their mentor teachers. Therefore, a bad experience may negatively affect student teachers' identity. Finally, to provide better assistance for EFL pre-



service teacher's identity development, the government needs to prepare more contextual educational training (practicums) for student teachers to make them ready to be tolerant to possible challenges in their future teaching career (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020). In conclusion, this topic is relevant in our educational field as Torres and Ramos (2019) suggested "when teachers and students are aware of who they are, what they need, and the factors influencing their teaching and learning processes, they are capable of making more informed decisions and implementing changes in the curriculum" (p. 8).



Background

Identity is an essential part of human beings that provides people a special sense of attachment or ownership (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). According to Wijaya and Mbato (2020), there are two types of identities, personal and professional identities.

Personal identities have to do with how people define their beliefs into some tangible actions while professional identities are about how people complement their beliefs and practices to act in particular social circumstances and communities' expectations. Additionally; Canh (2013) established that academic professional identity is a combination of the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional context in which they work.

In EFL classrooms, teachers should be aware of their identity formation since interaction takes place every day in class (Abbas & Fatemeh, 2014). Teachers' professional identity is very important in their professional lives since it is considered as a resource that educators use to explain the way they act, justify their actions, and make sense of themselves in relation to others and to the world (Zhao & Zhang, 2017). As Salinas and Ayala (2017) stated, the teachers' identity construction process is influenced by social relationships and interactions with others within a sociocultural, historical, and institutional context. Factors such as school context, culture, students, and colleagues have been reported to influence teacher identity construction (Sallı & Vancı, 2017).

In the case of EFL pre-service teachers, Nghia and Tai (2017) (as cited in Zhu et al., 2020) observed that EFL student teachers' professional identities had been constructed before starting with the mere act of teaching in an educational institution. Yuan and Lee (2015) pointed out that pre-service teacher education programs do not only provide sufficient teaching techniques and skills but also help student teachers to build up a strong and positive professional identity to face challenges and solve problems during future classes. During the formation process, pre-service teachers' identities are influenced by the teachers who are in



charge of the practicums and the whole program of teaching training at the university (Zhu et al., 2020).



Statement of the problem

Although many people believe that teaching is a simple activity, it is not something that can be learned overnight by students who are being trained to become teachers (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020). While most of the research is focused on how to teach, motivation, and different techniques to teach, it appears that less attention has been paid to the EFL student teachers' experiences and the process of 'becoming' teachers during the teaching program and their identity construction (Williams, 2010).

Furthermore; there is a lack of support from government and educational policymakers that do not allow the development of the professional identity of EFL pre-service teachers (Abbas & Fatemeh, 2014). According to Salinas and Ayala (2017), since there are teachers that are not well prepared to develop their work or feel lost during the educational process, it is important to study identity construction because it would stop the problems before mentioned by forming educators who feel more committed to teaching. In addition, research on EFL pre-service teacher's identity construction may help the government and educational policymakers to prepare more contextual educational training for student teachers in order to make them ready to face unpredictable challenges in their future teaching career (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020). Salinas (2017) also pointed out that education reforms have an emotional and cognitive impact on teacher's identity. Finally, the inquiry of this topic may help to avoid what Zhang (2017) calls "Identity crisis" which makes teachers feel fear, anxiety, and confusion during the development of their professional life.



Rationale

Research on teacher identity has emerged as an independent research area in the educational field (Teng, 2017). Salinas and Ayala (2017) asserted “being a teacher is closely connected to teachers’ personal lives because the teacher invests his or her self and values in their work and creates social relationships with the community” (p. 36). Therefore; student teachers form their identity based on their participation in communities of practice (practicum), and the practice constructed is the expression of who they are and do (identity) (Nguye,2016). EFL pre-service teachers’ identities are affected not only by experiences they had lived in their educational contexts but also by experiences that are happening outside the classroom. (Mehmet, & Emrah, 2019).

There has been plenty of research on the identity construction of novice and experienced teachers; however, pre-service teachers’ identity formation has received little attention (Canh, 2013). In fact, since teachers’ professional identity is considered as an important factor for understanding the quality of their teaching, commitment, and decision making, it should receive special attention. Nevertheless, although the teacher's professional identity is rewarded as a topic of critical importance, student teachers and teacher educators do not know about it. (Hong, Greene, & Lowery, 2016).

In conclusion, based on what has been presented in this section; in the case of EFL pre-service teachers, many factors are involved in the development of their identity, and identifying them is the key for understanding the evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers’ identity construction goes through. Thus, this research synthesis is necessary for analyzing the most meaningful factors and the process that affect EFL pre-service teachers’ identity construction goes through.



Research questions

- What are the reported factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development?
- How do EFL pre-service teachers' identities evolve as they learn to teach in university and in their practicum?

Objectives

General objective

- To analyze EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction.

Specific objectives

- To analyze the reported factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development.
- To explore the evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction goes through.

Theoretical framework

Pre-service teacher's identity construction is a topic that has called the attention of many researchers for many years (Le Huu & Ngo, 2017). As reported by Vetter, Hartman, and Reynolds (2016), a special interest among modern scholars has grown in studying pre-service teacher's identity to learn about teacher development and responsiveness in class. Student teachers need to have an identity in order to know more about themselves and to build remarkable relationships with professional identity, knowledge, and action (Canh, 2013).

According to Wijaya and Mbato (2020), "to be professional EFL teachers in the future, pre-service teachers should continuously construct their identities amid various

obstacles and difficulties they confront in their working circumstances” (p. 96). For that reason, several definitions have been stated over the years about identity and pre-service teachers. Since identity is a fundamental part for pre-service formation, it is necessary to discuss different definitions that are related to the topic. This section will define the following concepts: identity, teacher identity, EFL pre-service teacher concept, and EFL pre-service teacher identity construction.

Identity

In order to understand what identity is, a clear definition is needed. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines identity as “the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In consonance with Melike (2016), identity has been studied and explored in different fields such as social sciences, philosophy, developmental psychology, and sociology. He and Lin (2013) stated that “the concept of identity is central to understanding the relationship between education and society” (p. 3). Some researchers consider that “identity is a concept developed by the individual as a result of the interactions with his or her own environment throughout life” (Melike, 2016, p. 2). On the other hand, Wenger (1998) proposes that identity is developed through participation in various communities of practice. Therefore, identity is the concept that people have about themselves and how they interact with others (Abbas and Fatemeh, 2014).

In modern times, “identity is understood as what we know, what we choose to know, as well as how we know it” (Zhang, Hamilton, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Jurafsky & Leskovec, 2017, p. 1). Identity is a path that is composed of past experiences and future expectations, and together are in charge of building the experience of the present; thus, this path works as a guide for going forward in the process of identity construction. (Wenger, 1998, p. 185). According to Bravo, Gajardo, Leiva, and Vega, (2019) identity is the clue to



understanding “people’s construction of their own being”; identity makes us choose to be part of a group or to be a single individual (p. 15).

Teacher identity

In an educational context, teacher identity has many connotations. Anspala, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström (2012) pointed out that “teacher identity is generally understood as teachers’ ‘professional self’ and how teachers feel or perceive themselves professionally as teachers” (p. 3). According to Canh (2013), in teacher education, researchers have studied teacher’s identities from different perspectives. First, teachers’ identity is viewed as teachers’ self-image (Canh, 2013). Second, teachers’ identity refers to the role that teachers acquire (Canh, 2013). Finally, teachers’ identity refers to what teachers prioritize in their professional work or lives based on their in-practice experiences and their personal context (Canh, 2013). Hence, teachers’ professional identity is considered teachers’ perception of themselves as professionals and the way that idea of professionalism is related to their teaching actions (Canh, 2013).

Teachers’ professional identity is the basis for understanding pre-service teachers’ identity construction since it determines how teachers teach, their professional development, and how they face educational challenges (He and Lin, 2013). Moreover, Hon et al. (2016) agreed that teachers’ professional identity has special importance since it allows scholars to understand teachers’ professional lives, their methodologies, their commitment to teaching, and their perseverance and motivation to stay in the field of teaching. Therefore, Abbas and Fatemeh (2014) suggested that teachers’ professional identity is the way in which teachers combine their professional and personal roles while they become teachers.

Chong and Low (2008) stated “teaching identity is a more personal thing and indicates how one identifies with being a teacher and how one feels as a teacher” (p.2). In addition, it is stated that teacher’s identity has its roots in the core beliefs, which are constructed and

reconstructed, that a professional has about teaching and being a teacher (Chong and Low, 2008). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) reported that teachers' professional identity is how teachers relate to others, the behavior that they adopt, and the amount of knowledge they decide to employ. In this way, "professional identity is the outcome of an interface between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional context in which they function on a daily basis" (Canh, 2013, p. 4). Even though professional identity makes reference to self-image related to personal identity and self-understanding, it is affected by other people's conceptions and beliefs about what teachers should know and do (Anspala et al., 2012).

EFL pre-service teacher concept

According to *IGI Global* (2020), the term pre-service teacher is defined as a student registered in a teaching program who completes the requirements and practicum before getting a teaching certificate. Pre-service teachers are in a process that presents potential change since they have to establish relationships between their ideas about teaching and what they actually do while teaching (Zheng, 2009). Kadri (2020) suggested that pre-service teachers go into a process of training to prepare themselves for classroom practice. The concept of student teachers is also defined as a student that through a training process became a qualified English teacher (Yalcin and Ilin, 2018).

Mufidah (2019) pointed out that the definition of pre-service teachers has two components: the first, awareness-raising related to language instruction and methods and techniques used in the class. The second component, experiential learning is connected with teaching such as teaching practice or peer teaching (Mufidah, 2019). However, Zheng, (2009) indicates that although two components should be taken into account when defining the concept of pre-service teachers, they spend much more time learning the language than practicing pedagogical knowledge. Although the training stage is very short, student teachers



are provided with knowledge and skills that should be mastered at the end of the course to qualify as teachers (Kadri, 2020).

EFL pre-service teacher identity construction

It is important to prepare adequate pre-service teachers to deal with the different difficulties presented in the educational field (Chong, Low, & Goh, 2011). For the pre-service teacher, the sustainable aspect of identity is particularly vulnerable and it is susceptible to change during the educational program (Cattley, (2007). Chong et al. (2011) explained that the identity of student teachers is constructed by “early experiences both prior to and during the initial teacher preparation program combined with personal beliefs and prior experiences to form teachers’ professional identity, which in turn informs their future practices and influences their decisions and behavior as teachers” (Chong et al., 2011, p. 52). Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, and Nguyen (2015) argued that the construction of professional identity is an active and dynamic process that is negotiated while building relations of practice. In addition, it is crucial to look for a balance between beliefs and expectations about teaching. (Beltman, et al., 2015).

Identity construction takes place when individuals start taking positions within the communicational environment in the classroom (Trent and Lim, 2010). Therefore, identity construction and language are intimately related because language provides a sense of social reality (Trent and Lim, 2010). In the same vein, Zheng, (2009) classified language teaching as a channel of information. Chong and Law (2008) pointed out that student teachers’ identity construction is built during the process of the training education program. Moreover, Chong and Law (2008) suggested that identity is constructed based on their perceptions of teaching, their own experience as students, and their interaction with their own teachers. Furthermore, Beltman, et al. (2015) considered that student teachers’ identity construction occurs because of the interface between two elements, multiple personal and contextual factors. Professional

identity is an individual process that is constructed before, during, and after the training educational program (Chong et al., 2011). Even when students have finished their major in teaching, they continue to develop their identity and start identifying themselves with their profession (Chong et al., 2011).

Several studies about pre-service teachers' identity construction suggested that "student teachers frequently start professional training with views of teaching as telling and learning as remembering, which poses difficulties when they are encouraged to conduct communicative language teaching" (Zheng, 2009, p. 76). For this reason, to understand what pre-service teachers believe about teaching and learning is crucial that students are aware of how their identity can be constructed and reconstructed; therefore, it facilitates making decisions. (Zheng, 2009).

Literature Review

The expectations that people have of themselves in the future influence their life greatly, in areas such as their dream job, the place they want to live in, and the people they want to know. Furthermore, having an idea of what people expect for their future affects the knowledge that people have about themselves at the moment. If people do not reflect on their identities, they are not able to achieve their dreams and goals because they cannot see clearly the route they have to take (Izadinia, 2012).

The literature that has supported this project has been divided into three categories. First, the importance of studying teachers' identity construction; second the factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction; third, the development process of teachers' identity. Several researchers have tried to describe the process, features, and issues that are involved in the pre-service teachers' identity construction in EFL education.



The importance of studying pre-service teachers' identity construction

In the first place, several authors have discussed their ideas why pre-service teachers' identity construction is important. The following reasons that explain the importance of identity constructions were highlighted from the analysis of the literature that responds to this category.

To begin with, Wijaya and Mbato, (2020) stated that to be professional EFL teachers in the future, pre-service teachers should continuously construct their identities in the middle of various obstacles and problems they confront in their real-life situations. In addition, Zhu and Zhu (2018) pointed out:

English instruction continues to grow and evolve in international contexts, so it is important to develop a sophisticated repertoire of methods and strategies for helping teachers develop their identities as teachers and to accurately perceive their strengths and needs as beginning teachers (p. 13).

Cahn (2013) explained that one reason for teaching professional identity construction is centered in the construction of "critical thinking," which was mentioned frequently when the participants talked about their teaching in his study. The student teachers saw the goal of language teaching as developing their thinking skills and acquiring new educational values, not just developing their skills in English for communication (Cahn, 2013).

Moral and social support should be addressed constantly to student teachers to allow them to accomplish their teaching-learning goals successfully and establish stronger identities (Wijaya and Mbato, 2020). Moreover, student teachers' identity construction cannot be promoted in a short period, but it should be built continuously throughout intensive teacher training (Wijaya and Mbato, 2020). When teachers and students are aware of who they are and what they need in their learning processes on a daily basis, they are more capable of making conscious decisions and applying some changes in the teacher education programs;



they may also improve their motivation and invest in their classrooms (Torres and Ramos, 2019).

Wijaya and Mbato (2020) stated that “Identity is an interlinked integration among the teachers’ knowledge of discipline specific-fields, self-awareness, and ongoing rapport with other colleagues together with the students” (p. 97). EFL teachers’ identity construction has been studied from different perspectives because teachers have to go through a process of adaptation which has an impact on their professional identities (Salinas, 2017). Student teachers are believed to deal with difficult challenges during their transformation from pre-service to in-service teachers, and their capacity to construct professional identities is crucial to continue their teaching career. (Trent, 2016). However, student teachers are often left on their own in the process, with teacher educators asking students to adapt the theories to their contexts without meaningful practice (He and Lin, 2013). Trent (2016) mentioned that many student teachers experience a real shock when they start teaching in an actual school. This shock reflects a discrepancy between their expectations and the realities of the classroom, which may lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and self-doubt.

As Salinas (2017) pointed out that pre-service teachers’ identity is an essential topic to take into account in a globalized world due to the impact that social changes have on education. In a century in which the use of digital technologies should go hand in hand with teacher pedagogical practices and transforming education, there is a growing need for pre-service teachers to develop an identity that matches with pedagogical practices that stimulate students positively and productively (Nykvist & Mukherjee, 2016).

Factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers’ identity construction

In this section, the literature is focused on the factors that influence the identity construction of pre-service teachers. Different authors describe in detail the components that are part of the process of identity construction. The results are the following.

Salinas and Ayala (2017), Abbas and Fatemeh (2014), and Gabryś (2010) pointed out that one of the factors that intertwined in the process of identity construction is self-image; here are important teacher's attitudes, beliefs, mindsets, strengths, weaknesses, and abilities. Gabryś (2010) stated:

The concept of self-image has a central place in personality, acting as a source of unity and as a guide to behaviour [...] Self-perceptions may be based on roles played by an individual, as well as attributes one believes he or she possesses (p. 28).

Pre-service teachers' belief about themselves is crucial in the formation of identity (Salinas and Ayala, 2017). According to Nguyen (2016), student teachers realized that their identity would be built by increasing their knowledge and modifying their self-images.

According to Salinas and Ayala (2107), another factor that influences pre-service teacher identity is the learning environment concerning students' experiences during their years in college. This process goes through fulfillment, problems, and repercussions in the course of the educational program (Salinas and Ayala, 2107). Similarly, Torres and Ramos (2019) suggested that student teachers construct their identity as they are part of a learning environment; for instance, pre-service teachers share the interest of becoming future in-service teachers learning from each other. Furthermore, Salinas and Ayala (2107) reported that "one of the most significant learning experiences was the impact teachers had on their student teachers" (p.42). Pre-service teachers relate their future professional identity with a previous teacher they took as a role model (Torres and Ramos, 2019). Torres and Ramos

(2019) also remarked that “student teachers construct, de-construct, and re-construct their identities according to the experiences they live everyday” (p. 23).

Salinas and Ayala (2107) reported that practicum experience is also a determinant factor in pre-service teachers’ identity construction. The practicum may expand student teachers’ learning, give tools or strategies to solve problems, and increase confidence in their partners (Salinas and Ayala, 2017). In addition, positive feedback during the practicum plays an important role since it gives pre-service teachers a sense of success and achievement. Additionally, students in the practicum influence pre-service teachers’ identity because student teachers are required to do adjustments during their class to have an engaging class. However, student teachers may also face some difficulties such as the lack of feedback from their tutor teachers causing frustration (Gökhan, 2020).

Yuan and Lee (2015) and Zhao and Zhang (2017) suggested that pre-service teachers’ identity construction is based on cognitive and emotional factors. In the case of teacher cognition; Yuan and Lee (2015) defined it as “what teachers know, believe and think” (p. 471). Different research studies have shown that student teachers' identity construction is closely related to their cognitive development because it is in constant change depending on teachers’ practice in scholarly settings which also modifies pre-service teachers' identity (Yuan and Lee, 2015). On the other hand, emotions are also part of the teaching process which includes a large number of complex emotions, pressure, and challenges. (Yuan and Lee, 2015). Moreover, pre-service teachers’ emotional side is fundamental in identity construction since it can have a positive or negative impact during the teaching process in professional life (Yuan and Lee, 2015). Zhao and Zhang (2017) stated that these two elements, cognition and emotions, cannot work separately since both of them are presented in subjective evaluation.

Wijaya and Mbato (2020) pointed out that motivation is an important factor in the construction of identity in pre-service teachers. Motivation plays a key role in constructing stronger identities since it directly affects pre-service teaching vocation and helps them to achieve goals during their formation as professionals (Wijaya and Mbato, 2020). In addition, Wijaya and Mbato (2020) described two kinds of motivation in pre-service teacher's identity construction; the first kind, an internal motivation which is related to the feeling to give the best of themselves in their teaching-learning practices. The second type of motivation is the external one in which it is important the continuous moral and social support from professors and practicum tutors as well as a positive environment (Wijaya and Mbato, 2020). Thus, strong teacher identities can be formed as long as pre-service teachers receive external moral support and self-motivation to continue with their teaching vocation and with their investment in the classroom (Wijaya and Mbato, 2020).

The development process of a pre-service teacher identity

In this final section, the literature is intended to explain the development process of pre-service teacher identity as a fundamental part of identity formation. The following authors discussed the development process and their theories are compared and contrasted.

Cahn (2013) declared that the process of professional identity is a continuing process in which there is a combination of both the 'personal' and the 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher. According to Aktekin and Celebi (2020), pre-service teachers' personal side is defined as the understanding of the one-self outside the educational context while the professional side is the understanding of the one-self within the educational context. Moreover, Yuan and Lee (2015) stated that the programs that pre-service teacher study not only prepare them with the necessary teaching methods and techniques but also they construct a strong and positive professional identity to deal with difficulties in future real-life situations. By doing so,

professional identity is the final result of an alliance between the personal experiences and institutional context in which they work every day (Cahn, 2013).

Pre-service teachers face many issues as learners and as novice teachers during the transitional process of being a student and becoming a teacher (Torres and Ramos, 2019). Sallı and Vancı (2017) mentioned different research studies in which the construction process develops over time; it means that student teachers tend to leave their student identities throughout the practicum period to construct their teacher professional identities. These same authors suggested that “during this period preservice teachers attempt to establish self-images based on how they perceive themselves as teachers, images which they then present to others” (p.2).

Zhu, et al. (2020) identified four patterns that take place throughout the construction of pre-service teachers’ identity. The first pattern, confirmation/consolidation refers to teacher students’ perceptions about the relation between the prior roles and the new coming roles when they start and finish their educational program. The second pattern, elaboration/expansiveness refers to the improvement of the understanding of identity that pre-service teachers experience during the whole teaching training (Zhu et al., 2020). The third pattern, contradiction/disequilibrium indicates that student teachers constructed a new professional identity by quitting or modifying their prior professional identity (Zhu et al., 2020). On the other hand, the last pattern, stability/minor change indicates that pre-service teachers may not show professional identity change from the beginning to the end of the program (Zhu et al., 2020).

Zhang (2017) reported that the process of identity formation is developed throughout the interaction in various communities since there is the opportunity to negotiate meaning in exchange for new knowledge. In addition, preservice teachers’ identity is constructed based on their participation and engagement with these communities (Zhang, 2017). Zhang (2017)

agreed that “identities formed through participation within various communities of practice are expressed in discourse, which consists of a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values that exist within particular social and cultural practices” (p. 1237).

Methodology

The literature search will carry out an exploratory research synthesis to analyze the identity construction of EFL Pre-service Teachers. According to Suri (2011), exploratory research synthesis is not only descriptive, evaluative, and informative but also connective. The purpose of an exploratory research synthesis is to generate new knowledge by comparing and contrasting individual studies. It involves careful selection, review, analysis, and synthesis of primary and similar studies. (Suri, 2011). The articles will be empirical studies so that one can get a better idea about the factors that affect EFL pre-service teachers’ identity construction and the process they go through while they construct their identity.

Specific criteria will be used for the selection of studies for this research synthesis. First, EFL context is taken into account for the selection of the studies. Second, the participants of the selected studies will have to be EFL pre-service teachers or student teachers. Moreover, the reviewed articles must be published for the last 10 years to guarantee reliable and current data in the field of the research of teachers’ identity construction. Finally, there will be no restriction with the design of the studies which may use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches. The articles will be selected through databases such as OISE Library, ResearchGate, Scholar Google, Elsevier, Academia, EBSCO Host, and ProQuest. The research terms used for this search will be the following: a) Identity construction, b) student teachers, c) pre-service teachers, d) EFL Teachers, e) learning, f) English. Lastly, the journals that will be analyzed are *HOW*, *Journal of Education and Society*, *Asia Pacific*



Journal of Education, Research Papers in Education, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, among others.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to answer the research questions of this synthesis, 20 studies were collected and analyzed. These studies were classified in the following categories: year of publication, geographical area, factors that influence EFL pre-service teacher's identity development, and EFL pre-service teacher development in the university and their practicum. Data were organized in tables with their corresponding analysis and discussion.

Year of Publication of the Studies

Table 1

<i>Year of Publication of the Studies</i>		
Year of publication	Nº of Studies	Author/Year
2010-2015	5	Gabryś (2010); Izadinia (2012); He & Lin (2013); Abbas & Fatemeh (2014); Canh (2013).
2016-2020	15	Yuan & Lee (2015); Nguyen (2016); Nykvist & Mukherjee (2016); Trent (2016); Salinas & Ayala (2017); Salinas (2017); Sallı & Vancı (2017); Zhang (2017); Zhao & Zhang (2017); Zhu, Rice, Zhu, & Zhu (2018); Torres & Ramos (2019). Wijaya & Mbato

		(2020); Li & Zhu (2020); Aktekin & Celebi (2020); Gökhan (2020).
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N= 20

Table 1 shows the number of studies according to their year of publication. Data demonstrates that 15 of them were published within the last five years while the rest of them were published at an earlier period of time. The results suggested that the interest in studying teachers' identity has increased during the last years, and there are still some areas that need to be explored in the future. To support our findings, Yuan and Lee (2015) stated that due to the increase of interest in improving teachers' conditions, special attention has been placed on teachers' identity over the last years. In the same vein, Nykvist and Mukherjee (2016), agreed that research on identity and teacher education has increased because of the strong relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. In addition, Salinas and Ayala (2017) mentioned that teacher's identity has received considerable attention in language teaching education (LTE) in the last decades.

Geographical Area

Table 2

<i>Geographical Area</i>			
Geographical Area	Nº of Studies	%	Author/Place

America	3	15%	Salinas & Ayala (2017) / Chile. Salinas (2017) /Chile. Torres & Ramos (2019) / Colombia.
Africa	0	0%	
Asia	11	55%	Abbas & Fatemeh (2014). /Iran. Canh (2013) /Vietnam. He & Lin (2013). / China; Nguyen (2016). / Vietnam. Trent, J. (2016) / Hong Kong. Wijaya & Mbato (2020) / Indonesia. Yuan & Lee (2015) / China. Zhang (2017) / China. Zhao, & Zhang (2017) / China. Zhu, Rice, Li, & Zhu, (2020) / China. Zhu, & Zhu, (2018) / China.
Europe	5	25%	Aktekin, & Celebi, (2020) / Turkey. Gabryś, (2010) / Poland. Gökhan, (2020) /Turkey. Izadinia, (2012) / England. Sallı & Vancı (2017) / Turkey.

Australia	1	5%	Nykvist & Mukherjee (2016) / Australia.
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N= 20

Table 2 shows the results according to the geographical area. Data indicates that most studies about pre-service teachers' identities were carried out in Asia. Abbas and Fatemeh (2014) reported that in countries like Iran, teachers' identity is neglected although they are well prepared on aspects such as pedagogical, psychological, social, and ideological dimensions. Besides, the seek for excellence has made many nations such as China adjust their education policies to avoid being left behind; this has provoked educational programs to concentrate attention on teachers' identity construction (Canh, 2013). In addition, the interest in studying pre-service teachers' identity has raised in Asia because of the challenges that teachers have faced in the last years; for example, in Hong Kong, teachers have to deal with hard labor environments, lack of resources, school closures, unemployment, competition, and parents' negative perception about their English level (Trent, 2016). Moreover, inequality between rural and urban areas has led to a crisis at the moment of recruiting teachers; as a result, in China, training programs not only prepared students with methodological tools and skills but also with a guide for constructing more robust professional identities to handle future demands of the educational system (Yuan & Lee, 2015). Further, Zhang (2017) remarks that "in China, where most English teachers are nonnative English-speaking teachers, it is of great significance [...] to explore how their nonnative speakership influences the way the teachers perceive themselves as nonnative English-speaking teachers" (p.1236).

On the other hand, Europe, America, and Australia have conducted less research about pre-service teachers' identity. For instance, in America, to be specific in Chile, attention has

been paid to pre-service teachers' identity because teaching English as a foreign language is considered a priority (Salinas, 2017). Finally, in Africa research studies have not been found.

Factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development

This category analyzes the factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development. For this category, 16 studies were chosen since they are focused on self-image, learning environment, practicum, cognitive and emotional factors, and motivation.

Table 3

Factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development.

<i>Factors</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Author/Year</i>
Self-image.	6	Abbas & Fatemeh (2014); Aktekin & Celebi (2020); Canh (2013); Salinas & Ayala (2017); Sallı & Vancı (2017); Zhang (2017).
Learning environment.	6	*Abbas & Fatemeh (2014); *Canh, (2013); *Salinas & Ayala (2017); Torres & Ramos (2019); Trent (2016); Wijaya & Mbato (2020);
Practicum.	8	Gökhan (2020); *Salinas & Ayala

		(2017); *Torres & Ramos (2019); *Wijaya & Mbato (2020); Zhao & Zhang (2017); Yuan & Lee (2015); Zhu, Rice, Li, & Zhu (2020); Zhu & Zhu (2018).
Cognitive and emotional factors.	2	*Salinas (2017); *Yuan & Lee (2015).
Motivation.	2	*Trent (2016); *Wijaya & Mbato (2020).

N= 16

* Studies are counted in more than one category

Self-image

According to the analysis, self-image refers to how pre-service teachers see themselves as teachers in their personal and professional relationships, (Abbas & Fatemeh, 2014; Aktekin & Celebi, 2020; Canh, 2013; Salinas & Ayala, 2017; Sallı & Vancı, 2017; Zhang, 2017). The general results indicate that pre-service teachers change their perception of themselves after going through the process of formation and practicum. Moreover, Sallı and Vancı (2017) stated that students have expected and feared teacher-selves; during their

practicum, observing other teachers and interacting with other pre-service teachers reduced the feared perceptions of themselves.

Additionally, based on the analysis of the studies, the self-image that pre-service teachers have about themselves, especially in the last years of their training program, is highly demanding since their focus has been directed to language proficiency, rather than pedagogical strategies. “Identifying and working on teachers’ views of themselves is crucial as their sense of becoming teachers will help them build motivation, self-confidence, and professional commitment” (Sally & Vanci, 2017, p. 15). On the whole, gratification and challenges renew student teachers’ self-image, for that reason, self-image goes through a process of problem-solving, adaptation, and negotiation (Salinas & Ayala, 2017).

Learning environment

The learning environment has positive and negative impacts in pre-service teachers’ identity construction (Abbas & Fatemeh, 2014; Canh, 2013; Salinas & Ayala, 2017; Torres & Ramos, 2019; Trent, 2016; Wijaya & Mbato, 2020). Based on the analyzed data, the learning environment helps student teachers to shape their identities since every single class is considered an opportunity for development. The process of identity construction occurred little by little throughout the experiences shared with other members of the school community such as classmates and teachers. These experiences allow student teachers to reflect on their future identities as professionals.

Torres and Ramos (2019) stated that “teachers comprised a dynamic and shifting process in which harmonic and complex momentums were lived” (p.22). In general, the articles show that a positive relationship and feedback between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers is necessary since gratifications and motivation give student teachers a sense of belonging to the course and a strong base for constructing their identities. In contrast, a

negative learning environment does not allow this to happen. Additionally, classmates also influence each other's identity because they share the same context and challenges which creates an atmosphere of comprehension between peers. Torres and Ramos (2019) point out “student- teachers construct their identities as future teachers taking into consideration their previous experiences as learners” (p. 23).

Practicum

Another factor that influences pre-service teachers' identity is practicum. (Gökhan, 2020; Salinas & Ayala, 2017; Torres & Ramos, 2019; Wijaya & Mbato, 2020; Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2015; Zhu, Rice, Li, & Zhu, 2020; Zhu & Zhu, 2018). A significant result among these studies was the importance of practicum in the different training programs since it provides student teachers with experience in real-life situations. Yuan and Lee (2015) remark that “student teachers' identity development can also be facilitated during the teaching practicum” (p. 471). On the contrary, separating practicum from the university coursework may make students feel lost due to the lack of exposure to the reality of the classroom. It is important to be aware of the improvements of teaching strategies of pre-service teachers during their internship which occur through conscious reflective practices and help student teachers improve their future methodology inside the classroom (Salinas & Ayala, 2017). Indeed, Zhu et al. (2020) pointed out in their study that at the beginning of the teaching practicum, participants had idealistic perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of English teachers. However, at the end of their practicum, students reported a more realistic and authentic understanding of their roles. Finally, practicum is a process that continuously transforms the identity of pre-service teachers.

Cognitive and emotional factors

In this category, the analysis of the article, Salinas (2017) and Yuan and Lee (2015) demonstrate that the cognitive and emotional factors are interlinked and can interact with each other since emotional changes affect student teachers' cognitive learning. In addition, it is important to make a distinction between emotional and cognitive factors. Salinas (2017) mentioned that the emotional factor is composed of different elements such as the environment inside and outside the classroom and the sense of appreciation from teachers and classmates; on the other hand, Yuan and Lee (2015) explained that the cognitive factor has to do with the construction of student teachers' knowledge about their practices for teaching.

Motivation

Finally, in this category, motivation is fundamental in the construction of identity. In the analysis of the articles, Trent (2016) and Wijaya and Mbato (2020) remark on the importance of motivation as a trigger for shaping student teachers' identity. Therefore, as long as pre-service teachers keep support from mentor teachers, parents, classmates, and educational authorities, they are more willing to stay in their career as teachers. Future teachers are expected to fulfill the task not only as traditional educators but also as motivators since their training is not only based on methodologies but also on human relations (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020).

The evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction goes through

Finally, this category analyzes the evolution process of pre-service teachers during their English program training and practicum. For this category, 20 studies were chosen since they explore the four patterns of professional identity change of EFL student teachers, the professional and personal sides, the practicum, and the interaction in various communities.

Table 4

The evolution process that EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction goes through

EFL pre-service teachers' development in University and Practicum	N° of Studies	Author
<p>Patterns:</p> <p>Confirmation/consolidation.</p> <p>Elaboration/expansiveness.</p> <p>Contradiction/disequilibrium.</p> <p>Stability/minor change.</p>	1	Zhu, Rice, Li, & Zhu (2020).
<p>The 'personal' and the 'professional' sides.</p>	10	Gabrys (2010); He & Lin (2013); Izadinia (2012); Salinas (2017); Sallı & Vancı (2017); Trent (2016); Torres & Ramos (2019); Wijaya & Mbato (2020); Yuan & Lee (2015); Zhu & Zhu (2018).
<p>Interaction in various communities</p>	12	Gökha (2020); *He & Lin (2013); *Izadinia. (2012). Nguyen (2016); *Salinas (2017); *Sallı & Vancı (2017); *Torres & Ramos (2019);

		*Trent (2016); *Wijaya & Mbato (2020); *Yuan & Lee (2015); Zhang (2017); Zhao & Zhang (2017).
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N= 15

* Studies are counted in more than one category

Patterns of professional identity change of EFL student teachers

The analysis of the data demonstrates that four patterns take place during EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction. Zhu et al. (2020) found these patterns when a study was conducted in the Chinese educational context. First, confirmation/consolidation describes the understanding among prior roles and the final role acquired at the end of the training program. Second, elaboration/expansiveness is understood as the awareness of pre-service teachers about their identity perceptions in comparison with their initial perceptions. Third, contradiction/disequilibrium refers to the final version of identity constructed by EFL pre-service teachers after rejecting their old version. In contrast, stability/minor change indicates that in rare cases there is not a significant change when comparing student teachers' identity at the beginning and the end of the training program. To conclude, by observing the results of this study, the patterns describe the stages that STs experiment when they build their professional identities.

The personal and professional sides of identity

After analyzing the articles, it was found that student teachers' identity seems to have stability during the process of formation (Gabryś, 2010). However, pre-service teachers' identity is divided into two areas, the professional and the personal. Therefore, Wijaya and Mbato (2020) state that "that the teachers will instill stronger identities when they are willing

to be more persistent in discovering the most effective solutions for their personal and professional issues” (p. 97).

In Wijaya and Mbato’s (2020) study, it was remarked that pre-service teachers behave according to their beliefs. Indeed, personal identity is enclosed with knowledge because student teachers need to have a complete understanding of how knowledge works in different contexts (Torres & Ramos, 2019). In addition, Yuan & Lee (2015) demonstrated that personal identity is also based on emotional factors which affect self-esteem. For instance, participants in Yuan and Lee (2015) went through depression because they were having problems when teaching, and this affected their personality. As a result, professional identity is directly influenced by the personal side, which represents a strong link between these two sides.

By contrast, Gökhan (2020) and Zhao and Zhang (2017) explain in their studies that professional identity is shaped over several circumstances such as classroom management, teaching problems, role modeling, and special education needs. In addition, professional identity has great influence from people who are part of the environment of student teachers. For example, Zhao and Zhang (2017) observed that the most positive aspect that influenced the professional identity of the participants was the methodology used by their mentors and the experience with their students. In conclusion, building a robust professional identity is essential since pre-service teachers will be capable of making decisions such as to stay or leave their career, their job, and choose future study programs.

Interaction in various communities

This last subcategory explains the interaction of pre-service teachers in various communities such as the university and practicum (Gökha, 2020; He & Lin, 2013; Izadinia, 2012; Nguyen, 2016; Salinas, 2017; Sallı & Vancı, 2017; Torres & Ramos, 2019; Trent, 2016; Wijaya & Mbato, 2020; Yuan & Lee, 2015; Zhang, 2017; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Izadinia (2012) mentioned that participants built an identity at the same time that they become part of



a community and learned from its members and environment. In the analyzed articles student teachers were observed in two communities, university, and practicum.

Inside university communities, research mainly found that the relationship of pre-service teachers between university professors and classmates influences their identity formation. Since EFL classrooms are dynamic, student teachers are motivated to interact with other members of the university community, especially with classmates. Izadinia (2012) found that interaction with classmates leads to gain confidence, independence, and commitment to the program that they study since they criticized and observed each other positively. In the same way, professors at the university seem to have a significant role in pre-service teachers' identity formation; professors shape the idea that student teachers have about being a teacher. (Zhang, 2017). Pre-service teachers take some professors, especially the ones who interacted with them during the first years of the studying program, as role models (Zhang, 2017). However, according to Nguyen (2016), student teachers realized that the university community was not enough for adequate professional growth; therefore, they were encouraged to expand their interaction with other communities outside the university to continue learning to teach.

Finally, the practicum community also contributes to the construction of student teachers' identity because it provides several opportunities for them to get familiar with different educational settings (Yuan & Lee, 2015). Moreover, constant feedback from collaborating teachers at the schools of practice strengthens future teachers' identity for the future. Zhao and Zhang (2017) reported that the greatest effect of a positive relationship with their mentor teachers was the sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. Nevertheless, student teachers may be cast down by traditional methods applied by their mentor teachers; this would not allow them to develop their identities. For instance, pre-service teachers argued with the mentor teachers during their practicum since they were not able to apply progressive



teaching strategies due to the lack of cooperation of his/her mentor teacher (He and Lin, 2013). For that reason, mentors' positive support is very important during the internship stage.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this research synthesis was to analyze EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction. In order to organize the collected articles, the synthesis was intended to identify the factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity construction and to understand the evolution process as EFL pre-service teachers study at university and in their practicum. The findings of the data analysis were based on the research questions which were the basis for the conclusion section. Moreover, important concepts from the theoretical framework were taken into consideration for writing the conclusions. The objectives of this study have been accomplished, and the conclusions will be developed further.

Regarding the first research question about factors that influence EFL pre-service teachers' identity development, the analysis of 16 studies provided enough information to conclude that the main factors that influence the development of EFL pre-service identity are: self-image, learning environment, practicum, cognitive and emotional factors, and motivation.

As revealed by the analyzed studies, self-image goes through a process of change after student teachers finish their teaching program and practicum. Moreover, pre-service teachers need to work on how they perceive themselves to build motivation and professionalism (Sally & Vanci, 2017).

The learning environment also has rather a positive or negative impact on student teachers' identity since they observe and learn from teachers of the university, tutors of their practicum, and their classmates. This is relatable through the fact that pre-service teachers' involvement in the educational contexts as learners is a determinant component when constructing identity (Torres and Ramos, 2019).

Practicum is an essential element because it allows student teachers to be exposed to real-life situations that take place in everyday life as teachers. Therefore, pre-service teachers



have the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired during their teaching course in the practicum setting. This practice makes student teachers aware of the strategies and methodologies needed in a real educational context (Salinas & Ayala, 2017).

Understanding the relationship between the emotional and cognitive factors leads to the conclusion that they work together; and as a result, an alteration in the cognitive part would cause a change on the emotional side and vice versa. This is confirmed by Salinas (2017) and Yuan and Lee (2015) who agree that both factors are closely related.

Finally, motivation from the different members of the educational environment is fundamental to avoid student teachers' desertion from their training programs. In addition, pre-service teachers are expected to be the motivator of future generations (Wijaya & Mbato, 2020).

According to the second research question about how EFL pre-service teachers' identity evolves as they learn to teach in university and practicum, fifteen articles and their analysis led to the following conclusions. From the analyzed papers, three important components were identified: patterns of professional identity change of EFL student teachers, the personal and professional sides of identity, and interaction in various communities.

First of all, Zhu et al. (2020) reported that there are four patterns that student teachers need to experience when constructing their identities. These patterns are known as confirmation/consolidation, elaboration/expansiveness, contradiction /disequilibrium, and stability/minor. Throughout all these stages, pre-service teachers are aware of the changes in their identity that occur before, during, and after the teaching program.

The personal and professional sides of EFL pre-service teachers are connected . Although the student teachers' personal side has to do with beliefs, emotions, and knowledge,



it has a great impact on the pre-service teachers' professional part since student teachers construct their identities based on their personal beliefs, the environments that surround them, and the methodologies used by their mentor teachers (Gökhan, 2020; Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

Interaction in various communities was also identified as a component that takes part during the process of identity construction. Communities and their members were recognized as important elements in the process of identity. This occurs because student teachers are in constant contact with communities due to their introduction to the field of education (Izadinia, 2012). University and the practicum were reported to be the main communities in which pre-service teachers perform when they learn and build relationships. This is correlated with our context since EFL pre-service teachers are involved in a community inside the classroom at University of Cuenca and their practicum that is carried out in different educational institutions around the city.



Recommendations

After reviewing and analyzing the 20 selected studies, it has been noticed that there is a lack of research about EFL pre-service teachers' identity in the Latin American context.

There were only a few studies that took place in this region; therefore, more research needs to be developed; in this way, future student teachers can be conscious about the meaning and the importance of being an EFL teacher.

Additionally, it must be considered to include teachers' identity construction as part of the curriculum during the training programs. By doing this, student teachers have more chances of covering the new educational demands that arise every year (Salinas, 2017).

As well, educational authorities should support teachers' identity construction during the educational program; therefore, student teachers do not lose motivation during their career, and feel more committed to stay teaching after their graduation.

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Annexes

Appendix 1

List of primary studies for analysis

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